DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 523 SO 025 493

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TITLE	Issues Concerning a National Assessment of Civics. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
INSTITUTION	Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, CA.; Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	National Assessment Governing Board, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1995-05-00
NOTE	28p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Citizenship; *Citizenship Education; *Civics; *Educational Assessment; Educational Planning; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *Formative Evaluation; Grade 12; Grade 4; Grade 8; *Law Related Education; *National Competency Tests; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS	*National Assessment of Educational Progress

ABSTRACT

Viewed as a first step in the development of a consensus framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civic education, this paper focuses on the major questions that should be considered in designing a civics assessment. The paper aims to bring major questions of designing a civic education assessment tool to the attention of educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public so that they can discuss the issues and contribute to the development of the NAEP framework in civics. The framework will develop recommendations for civics knowledge for students in grades 4, 8, and 12 should know and be able to do in the area of civics. The issues identified in the paper range from an analysis of the evidence that a civics assessment is necessary to the design of the NAEP instrument. The paper concludes with a 56-item reference list. (TSV)

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ISSUES

Concerning A National Assessment of Civics

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT of EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

NAEP

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SO 025 493

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education in Civics and Government: An Essential Ingredient in a Constitutional Democracy

The old saying that the course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education was one John F. Kennedy liked to quote. He always added the cautionary note, however, that "in a democracy such as ours, we must make sure education wins the race," because, ultimately, a free society must rely on the knowledge, skills and virtue of its citizens and of those they elect to public office. Civic education, therefore, is essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy.

The goal of education in civics and government is informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. Their effective and responsible participation requires the acquisition of a body of knowledge, understandings and intellectual and participatory skills. Effective and responsible participation also is furthered by development of certain dispositions or traits of private and public character. Private traits of character essential to the well–being of our society include self–discipline, moral responsibility, and respect for individual worth and human dignity. No democracy can accomplish its purposes, however, unless its citizens also are inclined to participate thoughtfully in public affairs. Certain traits of public character such as civility, respect for law, civic mindedness, critical mindedness, persistence, and a willingness to deliberate, negotiate and compromise, when conscience permits, are essential to the healthy functioning of our political system.

These traits of private and public character not only contribute to the political efficacy of individuals and their sense of dignity and worth; they contribute to greater realization of the ideals of American constitutional democracy.

Many institutions help to develop Americans' knowledge and skills and shape their civic character and commitments. Families, religious institutions, media, business, and community groups exert important influences. Schools, however, bear a special and historic responsibility for the development of civic competence and civic responsibility.

The special responsibility of schools has been acknowledged time and again in various laws and policies, by virtually every state constitution, and in a number of landmark decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court repeatedly has pointed out the intimate relationship between education and constitutional democracy. When the unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was announced, the Court declared:

> Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education in our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our public responsibilities, even services in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. (*Brown v. Board of Education* 347 US 483, 493 [1954]).

In another historic decision, the Court asserted ". . . that the grave significance of education both to the individual and to our society cannot be doubted." (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* 411 US 1 [1973]).

Some twenty years later the Court was even more emphatic. Although the Court acknowledged that public education is not a "right" granted to individuals by the U.S. Constitution, neither is it "merely some governmental benefit" indistinguishable from other forms of social welfare legislation. The Court then went on to say that the importance of education in maintaining our basic institutions is undeniable.

> The American people have always regarded education and [the] acquisition of knowledge as matters of supreme importance. We have recognized the public schools as the most vital civic institution for the preservation of our democratic system of government, and as the primary vehicle for transmitting the values on which our society rests. [As] . . . pointed out early in our history . . . some degree of education is necessary to prepare citizens to participate effectively and intelligently in our open political system if we are to preserve freedom and independence. (*Plyler v. Doe* 102 S. Ct. 2382 [1982]).

Several recent events again have emphasized the need to prepare citizens to participate "effectively and responsibly in our political system." First, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was passed by Congress and signed into law in 1994. The Act proclaims "Student Achievement and Citizenship" to be one of our primary national priorities. It states that:

> *By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including...civics and government...so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment....*
>
> *All students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate...good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility.*

A decision made in 1992 by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) is a second noteworthy event. NAGB is a congressionally mandated, bipartisan policymaking panel that oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Among NAGB's responsibilities is the selection of the subject areas to be assessed. The Board's decision to assess civics, although significant, was not a surprise. NAGB is keenly aware of the importance of continuing to ascertain what and how students learn about civics and government. As a matter of fact, the first national assessments, administered by NAEP in 1969–70 were in science, writing and citizenship. In the ensuing years, civics was assessed four more times, in 1972, 1976, 1982 and 1988. Two of those assessments (1976 and 1982) were conducted as a part the assessment of the whole field of the social studies. In 1988, however, attention focused solely on civics and government, just as the forthcoming assessment will.

A third significant event was the publication of the first edition of the *National Standards for Civics and Government* in November 1994. These voluntary *National Standards for Civics and Government* for students in kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12) were developed by the Center for Civic Education with support from the U.S. Department of Education and The Pew Charitable Trusts. Some 3,000 individuals and organizations

participated in an extensive and inclusive two–year effort to identify what students should know and be able to do in the discipline of civics and government when they complete grades four, eight and twelve. All fifty states participated in the development of the *National Standards for Civics and Government*. Some states already have adopted and/or adapted the *National Standards* to their needs. Other states are now in the process of developing their own standards and frameworks for civic education.

The 1998 NAEP Civics Consensus Project began in February 1995 with the award of a contract by the Governing Board to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The Center for Civic Education (CCE) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) are serving as subcontractors for this 12–month project. Through a national consensus approach, the project will develop recommendations about what students in grades 4, 8, and 12 should know and be able to do in the area of civics.

An initial and important task in any NAEP assessment is producing a consensus document or framework. That framework then guides the assessment process which includes developing objectives, test specifications, methodology, standards for data analysis, reporting and disseminating results.

The consensus process can draw on resources such as the *National Standards for Civics and Government*, state frameworks and curriculum guides. The process also can be informed by published reports of earlier assessments conducted by NAEP between 1970 and 1988. Other reference points such as the status of current instruction in the states and localities, commentaries on civic education and the perspectives of various constituencies or stakeholders need to be considered. In utilizing all of these resources, however, developers of the forthcoming civics assessment need to bear in mind its ultimate significance: to improve instruction and to increase learning. By providing fair, accurate and timely information on student achievement at the national and state levels to the public, policymakers and educators, this assessment can effect improvement in civic education for all of America's children. That students are well prepared for citizenship is a matter of importance not only to them as individuals but to our society as a whole and to the maintenance and improvement of our constitutional democracy.

This paper is the first step in the development of a consensus framework for the proposed assessment. A primary purpose of this paper is to raise the major questions that ought to be considered in designing a civics assessment. A second purpose is to bring these questions to the attention of a wider community of educators, policymakers, researchers and the public so they can discuss the issues and contribute to the development of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in civic education.

THE ISSUES

The key issues are expressed in the questions that follow. Each issue is explored in more detail in the paper entitled "Issues Concerning a National Assessment of Civics," May 1995.

1. What evidence is there that a civics assessment is needed at this time in our nation's history?

2. What knowledge and skills should be assessed?

3. How well do students understand the ideals and the fundamental values and principles on which American constitutional democracy is based?

4. How should achievement levels in civics be assessed?

5. What school factors are associated with the civic proficiency of students?

6. What kinds of contextual information should be gathered?

7. Which assessment strategies should be used?

8. How can this assessment be designed to provide information relevant to policymakers, educators and the public and information that can be used to improve civic education for all students?

9. How can the assessment be designed so that it facilitates achievement of the multiple goals of NAEP?

II. THE MAJOR ISSUES IN CREATING A STRONG CIVICS EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

The major challenges in designing a civics assessment which can yield meaningful and useful results are embodied in the following questions.

1. **What evidence is there that a civics assessment is needed at this time in our nation's history?**

   Despite the fact that there is general—indeed, almost universal—agreement that education for citizenship is essential in a constitutional democracy, there are disquieting reports about the extent and effectiveness of civic education in the United States.

   When the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) issued what is called *The Nation's Report Card in Civics* in 1990, it provided some sobering data. Trend data indicated that some students made gains in civics proficiency across the twelve year period separating the 1976 and 1988 assessments, but most did not. At age 17, the performance of students attending schools in each of the types of communities studied—advantaged and disadvantaged urban and other—declined significantly. There were significant gaps in the performance of most students. For example, although half of the high school seniors tested displayed a detailed knowledge of major government structures and their functions, only six percent demonstrated a more developed understanding of a wide range of political institutions and processes. Equally disturbing were the disparities among subpopulations. Eighth and twelfth grade males were more likely than their female peers to reach the highest levels of civic proficiency as defined by NAEP. The percentages of black and Hispanic students who reached the uppermost levels of proficiency were far smaller than their white counterparts. *The Nation's Report Card* summarized its findings by saying that "the disparities in achievement among subpopulations raise serious concerns."

   A more recent (1994) appraisal of college freshmen also raises concern about students' knowledge of and dispositions toward civic participation, politics and government. This survey, conducted annually by the UCLA Higher Education Institute, was based on responses from about 238,000 freshman across the country. It revealed that "the proportion of college freshman who say that paying close attention to political affairs is important has declined to its lowest level in the 29 years of the survey's existence. Only 16 percent of incoming freshmen said they frequently discuss politics," another all–time low. Alexander W. Astin, Director of the Research Institute observed that "the growing hostility you hear toward government and public service is certainly being picked up by a lot of young people."

The Nation's Report Card in Civics for 1990 and the college freshman survey of 1994 paint a gloomy picture. Public opinion polls also reveal substantial gaps in the public's knowledge about what a constitutional democracy is, how it works and what must be done to sustain and improve it. In a democracy such as ours, however, it is not enough simply to despair of the lack of knowledge, disaffection with political leadership, distrust of our institutions or the disinclination to participate in civic life. Thomas Jefferson explained why when he said, "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control [of government] with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education."

To paraphrase Jefferson, "informing the discretion" of today's students means adding to their store of knowledge and deepening their understanding of civic life, politics and government. It means increasing the intellectual and participatory skills essential for effective and responsible citizenship which students can command. It also means improving the instruction students receive and the experiences in self government they are afforded. To accomplish those and other related goals there is a need for fair, accurate, and timely empirical data. To provide that data and an analysis of it that is relevant to educators, policymakers and the public is why a civics assessment is needed and why it is especially important at this time in our nation's history.

THE ISSUES

- How well are the nation's schools discharging their historic responsibilities for the development of competent and responsible citizens?
    - How much attention is given to civic education from kindergarten through grade twelve?
    - Do all students have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and develop the intellectual and participatory skills essential for citizens of a constitutional democracy?
    - Do students have an appreciation for constitutional democracy as well as an understanding of how it works and what is necessary to sustain and improve it?
    - What evidence is there to confirm or refute assertions that today's youth are alienated from civic life, politics and government?
- What purposes should periodic assessments of civic education in a constitutional democracy serve?

2. What knowledge and skills should be assessed?

Abraham Lincoln's characterization of the United States as a "government of the people, by the people, for the people" is a generally accepted aphorism. It means that every citizen in a constitutional democracy has the right—some would add the responsibility—to participate in his or her local, state and national governments. It means that the people have the right to control their government. This right is meaningless, however, unless they have the knowledge, understandings and skills to exercise that control.

If citizens are to exercise their rights and discharge their responsibilities as members of self–governing communities, they need to acquire a body of knowledge, develop an understanding of the workings of their own and other political systems and command the necessary intellectual and participatory skills. It is important, therefore, that we ask questions about what knowledge, understandings and skills are essential for all students. Or to put it another way, what knowledge and skills are of most worth to today's students who will be tomorrow's citizens in our constitutional democracy?

Several noteworthy efforts to establish content parameters for civics and government can provide guidance. The most notable of these endeavors is the *National Standards for Civics and Government*. These standards were developed by the Center for Civic Education through an extensive and intensive consensus–building process. Some three thousand American teachers, scholars, school administrators, parents, elected officials and representatives of public and private organizations provided critical comment on successive drafts. Review committees established in each of the fifty states also participated in the developmental process. In addition, civic educators and scholars from other nations contributed to the standards–setting process. The *National Standards for Civics and Government*, therefore, can serve as a springboard for the designers of NAEP. It is important to note, however, that for the first time a NAEP planning effort will be able to use published national standards in the subject area being assessed. The 1994 Geography and U.S. History Consensus Projects were completed prior to the publication of national content standards in those disciplines. The relationship between NAEP frameworks and national content standards, therefore, needs to be given careful consideration. Indeed, the Governing Board's policy states that the National Assessment should be aligned appropriately with national content standards.

National standards, and other recent state and local efforts to improve education, are particularly important because they represent a movement beyond minimal competencies and toward more challenging or "world class" criteria describing what students should know and be able to do. These criteria need to be taken into account in the framework development process, along with other important considerations with respect to content, such as the current status of instruction in the states and localities, commentaries on civic education and the perspectives of various constituencies.

Because the importance of helping all students develop the skills essential for effective and responsible citizenship is not always fully appreciated, some additional comments on the subject of skills are appropriate. Thanks to the emerging field of cognitive science, we know much more today about how children develop skills, acquire

knowledge and deepen their understandings. One of the more important findings of cognitive scientists is that learning is "domain specific". Each subject matter field has its own cognitive strategies. Critical or higher order thinking skills, therefore, cannot be taught in isolation; knowledge of the content or subject matter of civics and government is necessary, for example, to cast an intelligent vote, to understand public issues or to join with others to solve public problems.

Certain participatory skills also are specific to the domain of civics and government. Effective and responsible citizenship in a constitutional democracy demands more than knowing and thinking; responsible citizens are expected "to do" or to participate in the governance of their participatory community, state and nation. Students can and should begin to learn the requisite skills in the earliest grades and continue to develop them as they proceed through school. It is important, therefore, that the Civics Consensus Project identify domain specific intellectual and participatory skills and that those skills be assessed by NAEP.

THE ISSUES

- How can a framework for assessment be designed so that it measures not only what information or knowledge students have but how well they understand it?

- What intellectual skills are important for informed, effective and responsible citizenship; how are they developed and how can they be assessed, e.g., the abilities to evaluate, take and defend positions in civic life?

- What participatory skills are needed for informed, effective and responsible citizenship; how are they developed and how can they be assessed, e.g., working with others to solve problems, articulating interests, deliberating, negotiating, compromising, managing conflicts, seeking consensus, monitoring and influencing public policies?

- How much should NAEP reflect the content or the knowledge, understandings and skills described in the *National Standards for Civics and Government*?

- What civic knowledge, understandings and skills addressed in previous NAEP assessments should be repeated so that trend data can be established?

- What other descriptions of content in civics should be consulted and reflected in NAEP?

3. **How well do students understand the ideals and the fundamental values and principles on which American constitutional democracy is based?**

Civic education in American constitutional democracy does not prescribe what students should think or what attitudes and beliefs they should hold. As Justice Robert H. Jackson so eloquently put it in the landmark *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette* case, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

While "our constitutional constellation" does not tolerate any official orthodoxy, there are certain values and principles that Americans hold in common. Americans are a people bound together by the ideals, values and principles they share rather than by ethnicity, kinship or religion which are ties that bind some other peoples of the world. Our fundamental ideals, values and principles are set forth in the nation's basic documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, *The Federalist Papers* and the Gettysburg Address. Those foundational documents include such values and principles as the right to freedom of religion, speech, the press, the rule of law and limited government. The Pledge of Allegiance, familiar to almost every elementary school child, proclaims liberty, justice and a republican form of government as common American goals.

The fundamental values and principles on which this nation was founded and the ideals toward which it strives are abstract concepts, yet they lie at the heart of civic education. Understanding these concepts increases the citizen's capacity to discuss or debate current issues intelligently and to make more informed and principled judgments in light of them. Understanding the nation's ideals and its fundamental values and principles also provides a frame of reference which is useful to citizens in analyzing and evaluating the goals and operations of their local, state and national governments.

That students understand the fundamental values and principles which undergird our constitutional democracy is a matter of great consequence, because ours is a self-governing society. Each citizen is at liberty to decide for himself or herself whether and how extensively to participate. And that decision frequently stems from the individual's knowledge, understanding and perceptions of civic life, politics and government. For example, does the individual believe that his or her one vote counts, or that he or she can influence public policy decisions?

Our constitutional democracy differs from authoritarian regimes which prescribe what their subjects must believe and often demand that their subjects vote or "participate" in other ways. A constitutional democracy must rely on the knowledge, understanding and freely given allegiance of the individual and his or her willingness to accept or decline democracy's standing offer to enter the process of self government.

There are a number of reliable studies to which NAEP can turn in devising an assessment of how well students understand the ideals and the fundamental values on which American constitutional democracy is based. Some of them are suggested in a footnote to the following issues.

THE ISSUES

- How can a framework for assessment be designed so that it measures how well students understand the ideals and the fundamental values and principles on which American constitutional democracy is based?
- How familiar are students with the foundational documents which set forth American ideals and the values and principles of constitutional democracy?
- How well are students able to apply their understanding of fundamental values and principles to the analysis and/or evaluation of particular situations or cases?
- How does the understanding students have of constitutional democracy change as they progress through school?
- What understandings addressed in previous NAEPs should be repeated so that trend data can be established?
- What studies and other sources germane to assessing students' understanding of the ideals, values and principles of constitutional democracy should be consulted and reflected in NAEP?

Some suggested studies are:

- Astin, A.W. and others, "The American Freshman: National Norms". Los Angeles: Higher Education Institute, UCLA (now in the 30th year).
- Brody, Richard A., *Survey of Political Beliefs and Opinions of Secondary Students*
- *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools*: A Report from the Public Agenda
- "The Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Polls of the Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools" (now in 27th year).
- Ladd, Everett, Roper Center, University of Connecticut various surveys.
- Mayer, William G., *The Changing American Mind.*
- McClosky, Herbert and Brill, Alida, *Dimensions of Tolerance.*
- Niemi, Richard G. and Junn, Jane, *The Political Knowledge of White, African-American and Latino High School Seniors*, 1994.
- Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *Youth Values.*

4. How should achievement levels in civics be assessed?

One of the important concerns which must be addressed in the consensus process is the establishment of performance levels for students in grades four, eight and twelve. Originally NAEP scores reflected what students knew as opposed to what they should be expected to know. Then, in 1990, the National Assessment Governing Board, the congressionally mandated, bipartisan, policymaking panel that oversees NAEP, enacted an achievement levels policy. As mandated in the NAEP law, the Board inaugurated the use of achievement levels for assessment and reporting purposes.

Three achievement levels are defined here:

- "basic", which denotes partial mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills, but performance which is sufficient for adequate work in grades four, eight, and twelve
- "proficient", which represents solid academic performance, and
- "advanced", which constitutes superior performance.

NAGB's new policy recognizes that not all students achieve uniformly high standards. It is important, however, for educators, policymakers and others to obtain accurate and timely information about the levels at which various student groups are performing. That information, when analyzed, may suggest what the impediments to greater achievement may be and how instruction and learning can be improved.

Describing domain specific achievement levels is no easy task. It is tantamount to establishing performance standards. Or to put it another way, in specifying achievement levels or setting performance standards one is attempting to answer the question: How good is good enough? What distinguishes basic performance from proficient performance? What criteria should be used to differentiate advanced performance from that which is proficient?

Although establishing preliminary achievement levels descriptions in civics may be challenging, doing so is essential to effecting improvement in instruction and in student learning.

THE ISSUES

- What criteria should be used to establish preliminary achievement level descriptions?
- In the domain of civics, what knowledge, understandings and skills are required for basic, proficient and advanced performances in grades four, eight and twelve?
- How can NAEP data, reported in terms of achievement levels, be used by the public, policymakers and educators to improve instruction and increase student learning?

5. What school factors are associated with the civic proficiency of students?

Although the National Education Goals, as well as the policies of every state express the need for and extol the value of civic education, analysis of curricular requirements and the time allotted to the various school subjects reveal that this vital part of the student's overall education is seldom given sustained and systematic attention in the K–12 curriculum.

In the K–12 curriculum, civics often is taught within other subjects. In the elementary grades, it almost always is taught as a part of the social studies, so it is difficult to know just how much civics instruction students receive. Furthermore, the amount of time devoted to the social studies is limited. A study of instructional practices released by the U.S. Department of Education in 1993 reports that K–4 teachers in self contained classes devoted just 2.5 hours per week to social studies/history. In contrast, four times as much time was spent teaching English and language arts (10.6 hours) and almost twice as much time was devoted to arithmetic. (See chart page 13).

Civics instruction at the middle/junior high school level does not fare much better. A study of course offerings in 47 states in the 1992–93 school year revealed that just seven percent had separate courses in civics and government. Presumably some instruction in civics/government is incorporated into the more frequently required courses in history, social studies and geography but the content and rigor of the instruction in civics is subject to question.

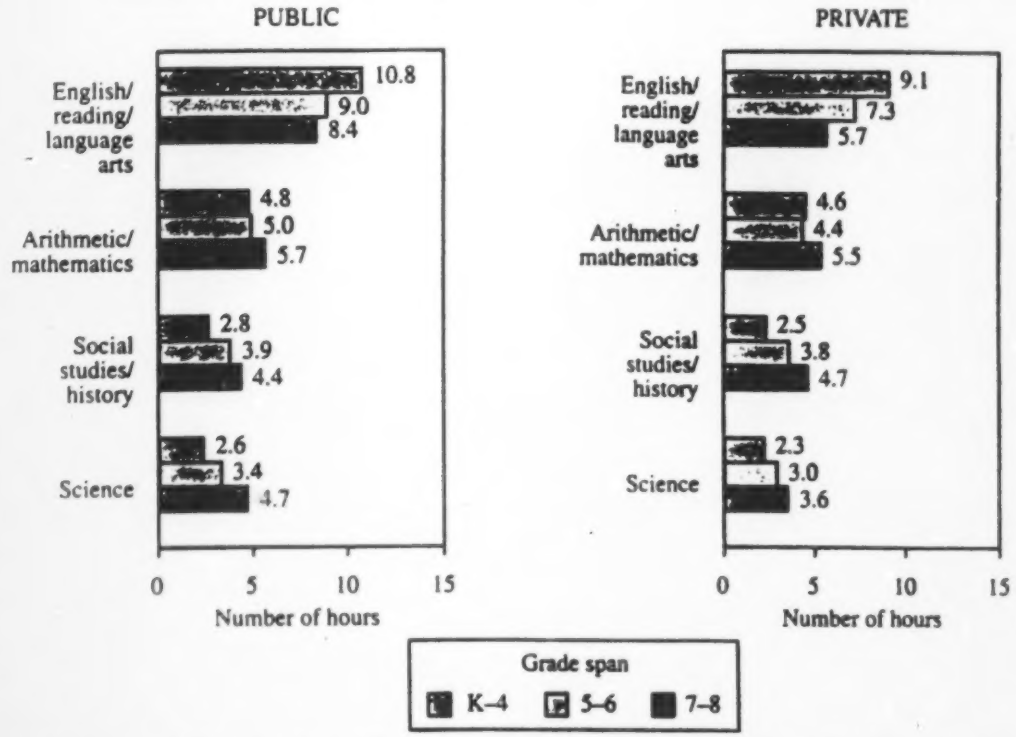
At the senior high school level, students may have opportunities to learn about certain aspects of civics and government in other courses they are required to take, such as U.S. History, American literature or science. Although opportunities for students to appreciate the interrelationships of various disciplines should be encouraged, incidental or tangential instruction is no substitute for focused, rigorous study of civics and government. At the present time, twenty one states have laws requiring specific courses in civics and government, but many of them are one–semester courses offered at the twelfth grade. For many students that is both too little and too late.

Does the amount of time devoted to instruction in civics affect student achievement? There is ample evidence that it does. *The Civics Report Card* issued by NAEP in 1990 showed that "at grades four, eight, and twelve students' civic proficiency was positively related to the amount of instruction they reported they had received in social studies, civics or U.S. government."

In her recent book, *National Standards in American Education: A Citizens Guide*, Diane Ravitch points out that "the more students are taught, the more they learn, and the better they perform on tests." That assertion has been borne out not only in assessments conducted in the United States but in international assessments as well. Reviewers of international surveys have concluded that "students learned what they are taught, and those from countries with more demanding curriculum learned more of the kinds of items tested in the survey, and performed better."

CHART 1

Figure 7.1—Average number of hours per week spent teaching various subjects in self-contained classes, by sector and grade span: 1987–88



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1987–88 Schools and Staffing Survey, "Teacher Questionnaire."

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What explains this inattention to civic education in the United States? It stems in part from the assumption that the knowledge and skills citizens need emerge as by–products of the study of other disciplines or as an outcome of the process of schooling itself. There is ample evidence from research, however, that this is a false assumption.

School factors and experiences which affect student learning and achievement in civics and government, should be identified. Not only is there a need for empirical data about the kind, amount and frequency of formal instruction; there also is a need for data about the informal curriculum or how the climate and the governance of the classroom and the school affect student achievement.

THE ISSUES

- How much and what kind of formal instruction in civics and government do students receive in grades K–4, 5–8 and 9–12?

- How, where and what kinds of informal instruction or experiences in civics and government do students receive in the school setting?
  - In the classroom?
  - On the playground or in sports or athletic activities?
  - Through student government?
  - Through extra or co–curricular activities?
  - Through leadership roles in school organizations?
  - From field trips, internships, interviews/dialogue with civic leaders who visit their classroom, school assemblies, observing and/or testifying before public bodies?
  - From school–sponsored community service directly related to civic life, politics and government?

- What is the relationship between student achievement and factors such as
  - teachers' academic preparation for teaching civics and government?
  - teachers' knowledge of civics and government?
  - teachers' interest in and enthusiasm for teaching civics?
  - teachers' attitudes toward civic life, politics and government?
  - teachers' civic involvement outside of the school day?
  - teaching/learning strategies used in classroom?
  - the kind, amount and frequency of homework?
  - the kind, amount and frequency of feedback students receive about their homework and other forms of assessment?

- How do the following factors affect student learning in civics and government?
  - Time and resources allotted to the study of civics?
  - Adherence of adults within the school community to the fundamental values and principles of constitutional democracy in their dealings with one another and with students?
  - Accountability of students for behaving in accordance with fair and reasonable standards and for respecting the rights and dignity of others, including their peers?
  - Importance or prestige attached to teaching/learning civics *vis-a-vis* other subjects, e.g., reading, mathematics, science?
  - Relationship of student achievement in civics to factors affecting the climate of the school and classroom

6. What kinds of contextual information should be gathered?

NAEP assessments have traditionally included the collection of contextual information. That contextual information has proved to be very useful. Not only does it encourage analysis from multiple perspectives, it often suggests ways to improve the achievement of specific student populations.

Contextual information is particularly important to assessment in civics because there are multiple influences on students' knowledge, skills, and their perceptions of civic life, politics, and government. The family, school, peer groups, religious organizations and the mass media are powerful agents of political socialization. So too are the kinds of experiences with authority figures which students have in school and in the community.

One of the difficulties in determining the kinds of contextual information that should be gathered is that educational research has identified so many variables related to student learning. Which of them are most important? In an attempt to answer that question, scholars from three leading universities conducted a "meta-review" of research. They identified 228 items which research has shown to be influential, but the primacy of the home and the community were confirmed, along with classroom and school climate and the peer culture. Other researchers would add the mass media to the list of primary influences, particularly on students' civic knowledge, understandings, attitudes and beliefs.

In the consensus process, attention needs to be given to the kinds of contextual information which are most likely to contribute to a better understanding of factors which affect students' civic proficiency. For example, the relationship between students' civic proficiency and the following characteristics of the home environment were explored in the 1988 NAEP:

- Parents highest level of education
- Number of parents living at home
- Amount of time mother works outside of the home
- Number of reading materials in the home
- Time spent watching television and doing homework

Are those inquiries about the home environment as appropriate to today's needs as they were when they were formulated? If not, how should they be modified? What additional contextual information is germane to this assessment, e.g., peer group influence, extra or co-curricular activities, student aspirations, community influences, the media?

THE ISSUES

- What features of students' home lives are related to their civic proficiency?
  - Parents level of education.
  - Number of parents living at home.
  - Length of residence in the U.S.
  - Language spoken at home.
  - Availability of reading materials and computers in home.
  - Discussion of public affairs.
  - Parents' participation in school and community affairs.
- How does the peer group affect civic proficiency?
- How does the community in which students live influence their knowledge, understandings and perceptions of civic life, politics and government?
- What opportunities does the community afford students to develop the intellectual and participatory skills they need for informed, effective and responsible citizenship?
- To what voluntary organizations do students belong, and what roles do they play in them?
- What role does the media play in:
  - providing information about civic life, politics and government?
  - stimulating interest in civic life, politics and government?
  - deepening understanding and developing intellectual and participatory skills?
  - contributing to apathy or feelings of alienation toward civic life, politics and government?
  - shaping students' dispositions toward civic life, politics and government?
  - encouraging citizen action and responsibility?
- How widespread is the practice of requiring school or community service as an adjunct to formal instruction in civics and government?
  - What kinds of school/community services are performed by students at the elementary, middle and senior high levels?
  - Is time spent in volunteer work part of the regular school day/year or is it performed on the student's own time (e.g., after school, weekends, vacation periods)?
  - What opportunities do students have to reflect and learn from service learning experiences?
- What efforts need to be made to insure that the contextual information gathered and the manner in which it is obtained do not infringe on the privacy of the respondents or their families and friends?
- What efforts need to be made to insure that inquiries designed to elicit contextual information are grounded in research and that they will, in all probability, yield data that will help to improve the education of America's children?

7. Which assessment strategies should be used?

In current debates about reforming education, perhaps no topic has generated more controversy than testing and assessment. One important element of the controversy concerns which assessment strategies to use. Arrayed on one side are critics of traditional multiple choice tests who charge that conventional tests measure only a small portion of what students know or "bits and pieces" of information. Another concern is that traditional tests encourage many teachers to "teach to the test," that is, they select instructional activities which will prepare students to pass mandated tests. Certainly this practice is understandable, since teachers want their students to perform well. However, preparing students for multiple choice tests may result in emphasizing acquisition of discrete knowledge over higher order thinking skills involved in writing and speaking on a variety of complex issues. In place of, or in addition to, traditional tests, some reformers advocate what they call performance assessments. Performance assessments are sometimes referred to as authentic assessments. Performance assessment strategies require students to construct answers, create products such as portfolios or computer data bases, or engage in activities germane to the discipline such as an interview of an elected official, a simulated legislative hearing or a moot court.

Proponents of more traditional forms of testing contend that the utility and the value of multiple choice tests are not fully appreciated. They say that determining the command students have of basic facts and essential concepts can be more easily ascertained by conventional testing. They also point out that traditional testing strategies can be constructed so that they measure higher order thinking skills. Furthermore, many proponents of more traditional testing do not believe that authentic assessment can live up to the claims of its proponents. Performance assessments are too recent a development to have been fully evaluated. In fact, a number of problems have surfaced in early trials of performance assessment in large scale testing situations. These problems include questionable validity of test items, difficulty in establishing reliability, and the extensive cost and time involved in scoring. Furthermore, some critics allege that performance assessments are so time–consuming that they seriously erode instruction.

In designing the NAEP in civics, arguments advanced for both traditional multiple choice items and performance assessment need to be taken into account. The history of reliability and generalizability of multiple choice items is strong, and certain kinds of learning outcomes are most logically tested by these types of items. Also, to assess trend lines, it will be important to repeat items from previous assessments. However, the new *National Standards for Civics and Government* and other programs, call for a more challenging curriculum, as well as for greater sophistication in assessing student achievement. Although still being developed and researched, performance assessments requiring "constructed responses" from students have the potential to provide evidence of students' mastery levels of complex thinking skills. Additionally, previous NAEP assessments have successfully combined multiple choice and performance assessment tasks which have proven both valid and reliable. Therefore, in this civic assessment, items which involve written responses, oral discourse, group discussion, portfolio presentation or some combination of all of them, might be included in recommendations for a system of assessments.

Finally, it is important to remember that how students are assessed has profound implications for both the teaching and learning of civics. Serious consideration, therefore, needs to be given to the assessment strategies which are employed and to the ways in which the assessments themselves may affect student achievement.

THE ISSUES

- To what extent should multiple choice content questions be used?
- To what extent should open–ended content questions be used?
- How might portfolios be used to measure student achievement in civics?
- Can portfolio and performance assessments in civics be valid, equitable and reliable?
- What kinds of performance assessment are most amenable for use in the field of civics and government, e.g., simulated legislative hearings, mock trials, moot courts, debates, panel discussions, class meetings, town meetings, interviews with people involved in the political process?
- What are the costs and benefits of newer forms of assessment for students, teachers, parents and the community at large?
- How are the students themselves involved in monitoring and assessing their own achievement?
- How do teachers use the assessment results?
- What efforts need to be made to insure that achievement measures are not biased against any population group because of race, gender, ethnicity, socio–economic circumstances or language spoken at home?

8. **How can this assessment be designed to provide information which is relevant to policymakers, educators, and the public, and which can be used to improve civic education for all students?**

The charge that Americans "overtest" students but "underutilize" the test results is often made. In the case of NAEP, however, there has been a conscientious effort to see that its findings are reported as promptly as is consistent with good scholarship and in forms which are useable and relevant to policymakers, researchers, educators and the public at large. This tradition needs to be continued and strengthened in the coming assessment in civics.

The **Improving America's Schools Act of 1994** declares that "the purpose of the national assessment is to provide a fair and accurate presentation of educational achievement in reading, writing, and the other subjects included in the third National Education Goal regarding student achievement and **citizenship**." [emphasis added] That Act, signed into law October 20, 1994, specifies that data shall be collected about achievement of students in both public and private schools. It further requires the collection of data on "special groups, including, whenever feasible, information collected, cross-tabulated, analyzed and reported by sex, race, or ethnicity and socio-economic status."

Ultimately the goal of NAEP is to improve education for all students. But to effect change, policymakers and practitioners require clearer guidance concerning the relative importance of different learning influences and the particular variables most likely to maximize achievement on the part of students across a range of conditions and settings.

THE ISSUES

- How might findings from NAEP help national and state legislators, school board members, parents and others evaluate and improve civic education in their own areas of responsibility?
- How might findings from NAEP about "special groups" [gender, race, or ethnicity, and socio-economic status], be used to improve their achievement?
- How might findings from NAEP be used by states and school districts to develop and improve their own frameworks and curriculum guides?
- How might findings from NAEP inform and improve the work of those who develop instructional materials, e.g., textbooks, videotapes, computer programs?
- What findings from NAEP might be used to improve the pre–service education of teachers?
- How might NAEP findings be used to inform and improve the professional development of teachers?
- How can or should NAEP results be communicated to the media so that they are accurately reported and so that they can contribute to better education in civics and government for all students?

9. How can the assessment be designed so that it facilitates achievement of the multiple goals of NAEP?

When NAEP was inaugurated in 1969, its primary goal was to provide "comprehensive and dependable information" on the progress of education in the United States. Accordingly, NAEP set about profiling the strengths and weaknesses in students' knowledge and understandings in specific areas of the curriculum. It also provided information about the contexts in which learning took place, but the focus was limited to home, classroom and school.

Time has not diminished the importance of the original goals of NAEP. But those goals need to be expanded, because the information needs and the nature of the challenges facing America's schools have increased. The contexts in which students learn about civic life, politics and government have changed. The task of providing "comprehensive and reliable" information adequate to the present and the foreseeable future", therefore, has become more challenging.

THE ISSUES

- What practices used in previous assessments have proven to be of most worth? How can they be identified and utilized in the current assessment?
- How should trends in educational performance be identified and reported?
- What information about the current status of teaching/learning in civics will be most useful to NAEP's many and varied constituencies and how should it be reported?
- How can a reasonable balance be struck in an assessment program so that it measures both existing and more challenging, emerging programs in civics education?
- How can innovations in assessment which reflect the best current thinking and research in the field be incorporated into the NAEP civics assessment?
- How can changes in assessment that may be needed for the 21st century be anticipated and how can they be incorporated into this assessment?

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